

CHILD SUPPORT IN REVIEW - FY 2005

Office of Child Support Enforcement • Georgia Department of Human Resources



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The Department of Human Resources Office of Child Support Enforcement proudly presents a report of our activities during FY 2005. Georgia not only remains in the national forefront in the collection of child support, but also continues to focus on the broader needs of children for safe, stable, nurturing homes.

The Child Support program serves nearly one fourth of all children under the age of 18 in Georgia and one out of every six Georgians overall. In spite of the budget cuts of the past year, we have been able to maintain our same high level of service and continue to improve in overall performance. I am proud of the innovative efforts of Georgia's

Office of Child Support Enforcement.

Highlighted topics in the FY2005 report include:

- A \$41.6 million increase in collections
- Protecting children by helping 456,000 custodial parents remain self-sufficient
- Innovative uses of technology to improve customer service and streamline the child support process, including online access to case information and the use of debit cards and direct deposit for payments instead of paper checks
- Protecting children by increasing the number of children with established paternity at birth through the Georgia Paternity Acknowledgement Program
- Helping over 2,500 non-custodial parents through the Georgia Fatherhood Program improve their abilities to pay their court-ordered child support

These accomplishments obviously reflect a staff dedicated to ensuring that children have the benefit of, at minimum, their parents' financial support and, at best, their parents' commitment of time, love, and guidance.

We wish to thank our many community partners who have contributed to Georgia's success in helping children and families.

Robert Riddle
Director
Office of Child Support Enforcement

Governor Appoints Child Support Guidelines Commission

The Georgia Commission on Child Support was created by House Bill 221, approved this year by the General Assembly. The purpose of the Commission is two-fold:

- Continue the responsibility of past guidelines commissions to ensure the economic viability and appropriateness of the state's child support guidelines so they can be certified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Carry out the responsibilities and duties set forth in House Bill 221, which changes the way child support will be calculated.

The 15-member panel appointed by Governor Sonny Perdue includes:

Representative Earl Erhart (R-Powder Springs) chairman; Judge Quillian Baldwin, Jr., Coweta Judicial Circuit; Judge Louisa Abbott, Eastern Judicial Circuit; Judge Debra Bernes, Georgia Court of Appeals; Senator Seth Harp (R-Midland); Senator Joe Carter (R-Tifton); Representative Stan Watson (D-Decatur); Sadie Fields, chairperson of the Christian Coalition of Georgia; Chuck Clay, Marietta; Judge Thomas Campbell of Roswell; Judge R. Michael Key, Juvenile Court in LaGrange; Joy Hawkins, Governor's Office; Annetta Panatera of Marietta, an information technology professional with IBM; Dr. John Clayton Thomas of Marietta, professor of public administration and urban affairs at Georgia State University; and Roger C. Tutterow, chairman and professor of the Department of Economics and Finance at Kennesaw State University.



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One Fourth of All Georgia Children Served by OCSE

Since its inception in 1973, OCSE has collected \$5.9 billion on behalf of children and families around the state. During the past year, collections topped \$595 million. That equates to just over \$1.6 million per calendar day for Georgia's children.

Much of this increase can be attributed to welfare reform, technology enhancements, enforcement tools granted by the legislature in recent years, and the dedication and commitment of OCSE employees across the state.

During FY 2005:

- \$595,848,339 in child support was distributed
- Collections increased by \$41.6 million over FY2004
- \$8.1 million was collected from intercepted state tax refunds
- \$43 million was collected from federal tax refunds
- \$4.6 million was collected from unemployment compensation benefits
- \$69,029 was collected from lottery winnings

- \$36.9 million was distributed to parents whose cases were not established by OCSE but whose payments are routed through the Financial Customer Service Unit

Serving Georgia Families:

- 16 percent of all Georgians (1.4 million custodial parents, non-custodial parents and children) are served by OCSE
- 24 percent of all children under the age of 18 in Georgia have a case with OCSE

Demand for Services Increases:

- Total caseload – 508,661 (up 10,400 cases)
- TANF caseload – 75,617 (down 9,350 cases)
- Non-TANF caseload – 415,472 (up 18,750 cases)
- Private child support cases (non-IV-D) – 17,572 (up 1,000 cases)
- Average agent caseload – 667 cases (up 28 cases)
- Cases with a support order – 357,242 (72.7 percent)
- Cases receiving a payment during FY2005 – 239,160 (67 percent)

More Georgians Requesting Child Support Services

	FY2005	FY2004	FY2003	FY2002	FY2001
Percent Children under 18 served by OCSE	24.1%	24.0%	23.7%	23.8%	n/a
New Non-TANF Applications	10,643	9,405	8,688	8,287	8,377
Total Caseload	508,661	498,249	456,960	460,562	508,796
TANF Caseload	75,617	84,967	80,305	88,741	94,142
Non-TANF Caseload	415,472	396,751	359,713	356,243	400,855
Non-IV-D Caseload	17,572	16,531	16,942	15,578	13,799
Average Agent Caseload	667	641	589	584	586
Percent Cases With a Support Order	72.7%	71.5%	72.0%	69.1%	60.9%
Percent Cases Receiving a Payment	67.0%	67.0%	70.4%	70.2%	68.9%
TANF Collections	\$50,764,992	\$51,045,722	\$51,373,736	\$50,788,479	\$50,110,287
Foster Care Collections	\$3,303,416	\$2,672,966	\$2,657,154	\$2,543,191	\$2,189,222
Non-TANF Collections	\$507,685,723	\$468,845,000	\$440,874,141	\$412,748,964	\$380,222,987
Total IV-D Collections	\$558,450,715	\$519,890,722	\$492,247,877	\$463,537,443	\$430,333,274
Non-IV-D Collections	\$37,397,624	\$34,307,620	\$31,498,352	\$28,272,719	\$21,630,399
Grand Total All Collections	\$595,848,339	\$554,198,342	\$523,746,229	\$491,810,162	\$451,963,673

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Constituent Services Portal Expands Customer Access to OCSE Services

In 2003, Georgia OSCE initiated a customer service tool called "Where's My Child's Check?" This enabled the agency to make information related to child support checks available through the Internet 24 hours a day, every day, so custodial and non-custodial parents could find out the status of the payments while preserving the privacy of personal information. The site averaged over 65,000 hits per month.

The success of "Where's My Child's Check?" caused OCSE to decide to expand its online services. The new Constituent Services Portal offers services based on high-priority constituent needs discovered through a survey of custodial and non-custodial parents. In addition, a team met with OSCE agents to understand the type of constituent services that would help them complete their jobs more efficiently and effectively.

Custodial parents can now:

- apply online for child support services (Over 960 online applications have been processed)
- view payments and payment details
- request copies of payments
- view case status
- update address and employer information
- sign up for email alerts including payments, court dates, appointments and other case activities
- view recent child support enforcement actions taken on their case such as license suspensions or liens
- arrange for direct deposit setup and cancellation
- email customer service
- request case closure
- add or update non-custodial parent locate information

Non-custodial parents can now:

- make child support payments online using their credit or debit cards
- sign up for the Fatherhood Program

During 2006, OCSE plans to reach out to those who do not have Internet access by providing Short Messaging Service (SMS) via telephone, cell phone and text message. Customers will be able to sign up for this service and the types of messages they would like to receive. OCSE will use SMS to notify constituents when payments are received and to remind them of upcoming appointments.

Constituent Services Portal in FY2005:

- Registered users: 56,931
- Viewed payments: 311,809
- Viewed case status: 172,659
- Credit card transactions: 4,471
- Total amount of credit card transactions: \$1,073,703

The Constituent Services Portal makes child support payment information available without the inconvenience of busy telephone lines or visiting a local OSCE office. In this era of tight budgets and limited resources, OSCE is taking the lead in using technology to help their employees work more efficiently and their customers obtain services more easily. Citizens expect an immediate response to questions, services and processes. In Georgia, OSCE is the first state agency to utilize technology in this manner.

New Law Helps Fathers and Children



Fathers who acknowledge or establish paternity of a child born out of wedlock may now, with the consent of the mother, establish their legal standing to ask the courts for custody or visitation rights without having to hire a lawyer and wait months. Georgia became the last state to simplify this extra step known as "legitimation" when the 2005 General Assembly passed HB53.

Legitimation is a legal step that gives children the right to inherit from their father, gain access to medical history on their father's side and be placed in a paternal relative's home if their mother can no longer care for them. Before this law took effect on July 1, 2005, all parents wishing to legitimate a child had to pay a lawyer and petition a court. Now, those parents who established a child's paternity after July 1, 2005 can also legitimate that child simply by filling out the same form that establishes paternity, if both parents agree. During July 2005, 99 percent of new fathers opted to legitimate their child at the same time that they acknowledged paternity. Fathers who established paternity before July 1, 2005 will still have to take a separate court action to legitimate their relationship to the child.

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Debit Card and Direct Deposit Speed Delivery of Child Support Payments

All Georgia parents who receive child support receive those funds either through direct deposit to their bank accounts or by using a debit card. The debit card, also known as EPPICard™ Mastercard, has been in full use for one year now and the program has already been recognized nationally for excellence by the banking industry. Both DHR employees and custodial parents have enjoyed the benefits of the program. The card provides custodial parents a safe, fast and easily accessible way to receive their child support payments.

Custodial parents who previously waited several days from the date of payment to receive a paper check can now receive a payment electronically in 48 hours or less.

The program provides standard banking services for many custodial parents who are unable to obtain a commercial bank account and allows them to leave their funds in a safe environment until they are ready to use them. It also allows families the option of keeping support payments separate from other family funds so that they can better manage their family budgets.

As of June 30, 2005:

- Georgia OSCE has issued 176,000 EPPICard™ MasterCards
- 146,000 of the cards issued have been activated for use by the custodial parent
- 83 percent of the cards issued have had payments posted

on them

- Approximately 75 percent of custodial parents use the EPPICard™ MasterCard to receive their child support payments
- Approximately 25 percent of custodial parents use direct deposit to receive their child support payments.



Georgia was the second state in the country to completely replace child support checks with debit cards and direct deposit, following Iowa's launching of a similar system in December 2003. Several other states have pilot programs. Georgia was the first state to eliminate paper checks for employees as well as child support recipients.

The debit cards can be used for a purchase – and in many cases a cash withdrawal – at any business that accepts MasterCard debit cards, and for a withdrawal at any MasterCard bank and at any ATM with a MasterCard, Maestro or Cirrus logo. Parents do not have to pay any fees to use the EPPICard™ MasterCard, except for withdrawals from an ATM or at certain retailers. The cards feature a color photograph of the Cherokee rose, Georgia's state flower.

Family Support Registry Assures Timely Processing of Payments

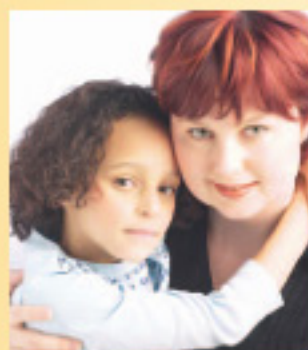
Welfare reform required the state to centralize its collection of child support payments at one location. OSCE created the Georgia Family Support Registry (FSR) to fulfill this requirement. During the past year, OSCE began a new partnership with Systems & Methods, Inc. (SMI), a Georgia-based company, after a competitive bid process. SMI began processing all child support payments for the FSR on July 1, 2004. Payment processing is more efficient than ever before due to SMI's use of the latest technology. SMI's State Image Viewer program provides all OSCE staff with desktop access to images of payments and any accompanying documents within minutes after they arrive at the FSR.

During the past year of operation:

- 5 million items were processed
- \$572.1 million in support payments were processed
- \$108.9 million were processed by electronic funds transfer, an increase of almost 25 percent over last year
- 1.9 million pieces of mail were imaged and forwarded to local child support agents for further action

- All of this work was done with an overall accuracy rate of 99.98 percent

The Georgia Family Support Registry provides qualified staff experienced in mail processing and imaging to ensure payments are processed the same day they are received. Customer service staff is available to answer concerns regarding all aspects of payment processing.



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Georgia Fatherhood Program Improves Parents' Ability to Pay Child Support

The Georgia Fatherhood Program, created by OCSE in 1997, works with non-custodial parents who owe child support through OCSE but are unable to pay. Gainful, stable employment enables these parents to provide regular financial support for their children. \$18.7 million in child support was collected from Fatherhood Program participants during FY2005.

Since 2001, the Fatherhood Program:

- Served 15,000 non-custodial parents
- Helped 2,700 participants receive a GED
- Helped 750 participants receive a vocational certificate
- Helped 9,300 participants obtain employment

The Fatherhood Program:

- Generally takes three months to complete.
- Participants are required to work at least 20 hours per week while enrolled in the program.
- Participants are required to pay child support during this time.

Upon completion of the program, participants receive assistance in obtaining full-time employment earning a wage that they can live on and pay their child support.

Many participants have barriers such as substance abuse problems or a criminal background that prevent them from maintaining employment. OCSE is not equipped to address these issues but works with other agencies, educational institutions and community groups to provide the necessary services.

The Georgia Fatherhood Program is the largest state-operated fatherhood program in the country. Over 2,500 non-custodial parents received services through the program during the past year. Almost every state now offers some type of fatherhood program. However, Georgia is one of the few states where the services are offered in all areas of the state.



Access and Visitation Project Increases Support Payments

Research has shown that parental contact makes payment of child support more likely and that fathers' involvement with their children improves the children's development and self-esteem. OCSE established the Child Access and Visitation Program to help non-custodial parents who want to visit with their children. The program provides non-legal services and intervention on behalf of the non-custodial parents referred to the program. To be eligible for the program, a non-custodial parent must have an active case with OCSE and both parents must live in Georgia or within 50 miles of the state border.

The Access and Visitation Program primarily served the metro Atlanta area, and a smaller number of parents in Athens, Columbus and Savannah.

Funding for the project comes from a grant from the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

During FY2005, the Access and Visitation Program:

- Arranged 270 visitations
- Developed 29 parenting plans
- Conducted 37 mediations
- Held 257 counseling sessions
- Enabled 587 parents to attend group parenting sessions

In October 2004, OCSE was awarded additional federal funds for a research project on the integration of child support and access and visitation. During State FY2006 OCSE will compare a group of non-custodial parents who receive enhanced services to a group who receive regular access and visitation services. The project will provide more supervised visits than the regular Access and Visitation Program and will attempt to engage the custodial parents more in the access and visitation activities. The research will examine the impact of these interventions on child support payments.

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In-Hospital Paternity Acknowledgement Program Boosts Georgia's Paternity Establishment Rate

Georgia's In-Hospital Paternity Acknowledgement Program has been very successful in improving its effectiveness during the past few years. OCSE contracted with Policy Studies, Inc. to provide training, technical assistance, quality assurance and public outreach to all birthing hospitals, state and county Vital Records offices, registrars and probate judges in the state. The training has been a masterful collaboration of several DHR programs including the Office of Adoptions and the Division of Public Health's Vital Records Branch, Family Health Branch, Newborn Hearing and Metabolic Screening programs, and Children 1st.

The program provides an opportunity for putative fathers and unwed mothers to acknowledge paternity at or near the time of the child's birth. Signing a voluntary paternity acknowledgement allows a father to have his name placed on the child's birth certificate. This is especially important because research indicates that the earlier fathers become involved in the lives of their children, the better the chance there will be a lasting connection between them. Parents are advised of all of their rights and

responsibilities prior to signing the voluntary paternity acknowledgement.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004 through September 30, 2005):

- 54,943 children were born to unwed parents in Georgia (up 1,300 children)
- OCSE established paternity for 45,218 children

The increase has helped OCSE achieve its federally mandated paternity establishment goals, in the context of federal financial incentives for success and penalties for failure. The continued success of this program not only benefits the mothers, fathers and children, but also helps OCSE earn additional federal funds.

Collecting Child Support

OCSE services are available to Georgia parents who need assistance. The custodial parent may apply at the OCSE office that serves their county or online at www.ocse.dhr.georgia.gov. There is a one-time fee of \$25. The service is free to custodial parents who receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The custodial parent is asked to furnish legal documents, if available, and information about the non-custodial parent.

Child Support Services include:

- Locating non-custodial parents
- Establishing paternity
- Establishing and enforcing child support orders
- Establishing and enforcing medical support orders
- Collecting and distributing support payments

Collection and Enforcement Tools Available to OCSE:

- Withholding child support from paychecks or unemployment benefits
- Intercepting federal and/or state income tax refunds to pay child support arrears
- Garnishing worker's compensation benefits
- Reporting parents behind in child support payments to credit bureaus
- Suspending or revoking driver's, professional or occupational licenses for failure to pay child support
- Reviewing and modifying child support orders periodically
- Intercepting lottery winnings of more than \$5,000
- Filing contempt of court actions which may result in a jail sentence if the non-custodial parent is found in contempt of court
- Filing liens on tangible / intangible property
- Seizing matched bank accounts after notice



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